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ABSTRACT

This series is intended for music educators and features speeches and articles by leaders in music and arts education on a wide variety of current issues. This publication deals with music education's complexity in relation to the United States society's complexity and specialization. Specifically, the paper questions how the field of music education can be more effective in influencing decision-making in a complex situation. Policy development contexts in this regard concern art, entertainment, competition, diversity, and unity. Five questions are posed as a base from which to address major policy issues applicable at every decision-making level from the classroom to the nation as a whole. These are: (1) Opportunity: Who has access to what kind of study? (2) Content: Who teaches what, who learns what? (3) Funding: Who gets the music education dollar? (4) Partnership: Who has fundamental strategic control? and (5) Politics: Who gets public credit? The document concludes that these five important questions defy simple solutions but there is a significant interrelationship among all of the questions. However, the music education community can be effective in the highest level of current policy work if it can manage a new infusion of will to do what is necessary as a field. (TRS) (TRS)

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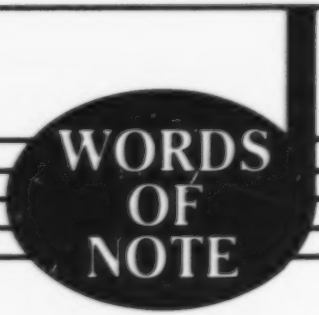
This new MENC publication series is for music educators interested in getting quick, on-target information, trends, and opinions to share with their colleagues, PTA groups, civic organizations, administrators, and others. *Words of Note* features speeches and articles of substance by leaders in music and arts education on a wide variety of current issues.



POLICY QUESTIONS IN MUSIC EDUCATION:

Opportunity, Content, Partnership, Funding, and Politics

By Samuel Hope

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Concepts and Contexts

Complexities. Music education is a complex business. It could not be otherwise, since music education places the complexities of education in service of the complexities of music. Difficulties produced by these complexities are formidable but not insurmountable; history shows that music teachers can prevail over such obstacles. However, conditions for pursuit of serious musical endeavor have become increasingly difficult; we have conditions for pursuit of rigorous education at the K–12 level. Although funding problems are often considered to be paramount, it is far from clear that finance is the only or even the central problem faced by the music education community.

For example, music educators might do well to pause for a moment and reflect on the extent to which the music education community currently has a common philosophical purpose of significant scope and depth, against which proposed policy directions, financial or otherwise, can be evaluated. Further, it might be useful to ask to what extent the music education community is able to make funding follow policy rather than the reverse. Of course, answers to both these questions will vary widely since each localized situation is unique.

In the United States, genuine respect for differences among individuals and groups is a founding principle: Decision-making processes and institutions are to be characterized by negotiation and reason in pursuit of the greatest good for the greatest number. However, the growth and development of mass communications during the twentieth century and the corresponding

development of advertising, public relations, and propaganda techniques have made serious alterations to the concepts of negotiation, compromise, and reasoned settlement of differences. The result is that American society seems to fragment into an increasing number of groups, each dedicated to achieving 100 percent of its goals, in a highly specialized area of the complete social enterprise. Specialization, so often criticized in education circles, has come to be pervasive in political and policy circles as well. Combined with the current penchant to oversimplification, this has problematic consequences for the maintenance of community.

While American civilization is large and complex, individuals can grasp a sense of the whole, even if they cannot become experts about the workings of every element that makes up the whole. It is this concept of wholeness that seems increasingly to be lost as group after group rushes to form itself to protect an ever smaller piece of the total turf from being gobbled up by real or imaginary opponents. When such fragmentation is carried to its extreme, a social tragedy can be set in motion: vision becomes diminished to the point that means and ends become confused, values become inverted and highly focused on specific goals rather than the general good. The common set of values holding a society together becomes history rather than a living reality. Cultural formation becomes a war among factions rather than a cooperative enterprise.

The question for everyone concerned with music, education, or music education should be how the field as a whole can be more effective in influencing decision-making in a complex situation.

Art, entertainment, competition. The context for policy development in the United States presents a major challenge to the music education community, especially to the extent that the goal of the community is to provide serious, curriculum-based instruction producing results with high academic and artistic validity. One primary reason for this is the increasing loss of distinction between art and entertainment. While some in the music education community are uncomfortable with making such a distinction, the extent to which such distinctions can be made and understood in the society as a whole is one of the most important factors influencing the policy context for music education.

For better or worse, lack of distinction between art and entertainment places study in music and the other arts in a secondary position with respect to the so-called basic subjects.

Entertainment, no matter how enjoyable or lucrative, will never be taken as seriously as academic subject matter now considered the core of curricular study.

Art represents a high order of human achievement embracing emotional, intellectual, and physical realities in a unique mode of understanding. While both art and entertainment have their functions, and while art can be entertaining, a nonpejorative distinction between art and entertainment is necessary to provide the rationale for placing significant emphasis on curricular study of music in academic institutions.

By its very nature, entertainment requires little or no study on the part of the general population. Only those few who have the "talent" to provide entertainment need study. The arts disciplines, on the other hand, both deserve study because they are unique modes of understanding and require study in order for these modes of understanding to become fully available to individuals. As is the case with the sciences, mathematics, philosophy, history, and other disciplines, the more intensive one's study of the arts, the more understanding one receives.

Music teachers have competition in the cultural formation enterprise. Some of this competition is obvious and comes from those who publicly articulate their views that serious music study is a frill, only appropriate for the talented, or unimportant in a technology oriented society. Less obvious competition is provided by those who are vocal in their support of music and the arts, but who see cultural activities primarily as venues for their social, political, or economic objectives. To paraphrase the old spiritual that says, "Everybody talkin' about heaven ain't goin' there," all those spouting rhetoric about the arts are not brimming with interest in the rigorous educational processes necessary to develop significant knowledge and understanding of the arts disciplines among the American people.

Diversity and unity. Music educators need not be overly concerned about the presence of competition. In any situation that is concerned with policy formulation, different interests or perspectives cause individuals to review the same set of facts and draw different conclusions. In American society, both the presence and vigorous articulation of these differences provide a primary means for ensuring that untenable, ineffective, or misdirected philosophies and their operational manifestations contain elements of their own care. Therefore, rigorous and sophisticated debate about policy issues is essential to the democratic process. It is useful to make a clear distinction about competition from

external forces and professional debate within the music teaching profession.

Clearly, the experience of teachers in various sizes and types of communities will produce different concepts about workable policy directions at the local level. It does not seem wise to seek homogenization of music education so that these local differences are minimized. Diversity and respect for diversity are such strong American tenets that any attempt to fashion a cookie-cutter approach to local music education policy seems doomed to failure.

Many concerned about the future of music education point to the presence of professional disagreement among music educators and postulate that this lack of unity is dangerous in times when music education is severely threatened in many parts of the country. While petty squabbling in public can be counterproductive, the presence of methodological disagreement within the profession is a healthy sign. However, one purpose of policy analysis and development in music education should be to seek agreement on as much as possible in the realm of basic values and operational principles while leaving diversity and disagreement about specific methods as valuable elements of work at the individual, localized level of application. The policy process should not be simply a search for means to evoke the herd instinct in support of the latest panacea, but rather a mechanism for maintaining an appropriate balance between unity and diversity by providing continuous illumination of various operations and the values supporting them.

If there is agreement that music education is part of the composite national enterprise of cultural formation, and if there is agreement that the primary purpose of institutionalized education in music is to provide students with knowledge and skills that will enable them to have access to the highest human achievements of music art, then there is a sufficient base to address major policy questions applicable at every decision-making level from the classroom to the nation as a whole. The questions below are posed for this purpose.

Five Policy Questions

Opportunity: Who has access to what kind of study? Recognizing that all people have the opportunity to experience music, at least at some level, the question is: Who shall have the opportunity to develop basic knowledge and skills, and who shall have the opportunity to become aesthetically self-sufficient in music? This

question is fundamental to policy development concerning curriculum-based music education for, if one seeks universal literacy in music, the school becomes the central element in music education policy and, by extension, cultural-formation policy. On the other hand, if one sees the serious study of music—and especially its implications for cultural orientation—as a matter of personal choice, the provision of school-based opportunities becomes less compelling.

This question also relates to the place of formal music study in the value system controlling educational decision-making. Our educational system tends to provide opportunities for studies in subjects deemed to be essential for existence in our society. Therefore, our educational policies demand that everyone have an opportunity to develop language and mathematic skills. Opportunities concerning science and history are also provided because our value system tells us that these are critical needs of every individual. Music study apparently does not carry the same value.

Opportunity also relates to the social context for music. For example, if the study of classical music is perceived as having utility only for those expected to be members of a certain social or economic class, there is little incentive for education providing access to this music for all students. If, on the other hand, the works of Bach, Beethoven, Brahms, and their counterparts are regarded as great masterpieces of civilization and the highest human achievements, it seems imperative to teach them as such along with the great achievements in science, mathematics, technology, philosophy, and historical scholarship.

Finally, the question of opportunity brings us to the question of the extent to which there is any universally applicable skill level deemed essential in K–12 music education. For example, is it unrealistic to expect that every student leaving sixth grade should be able to understand and relate to basic musical notation? Music Educators National Conference and other national organizations have articulated ideal curricula and expectations for school-based music programs. However, it is recognized by almost everyone that it is difficult for such ideal curricula to have universal application. Thus, clearly related to the question of opportunity is the question of what educational result is minimally acceptable as well as what results are maximally desirable.

Content: Who teaches what, who learns what? All experiences teach something. Yet, there are distinctions to be made between learning about music through passive experiences and learning

the discipline of music through curricular study and practice. Most educators would agree that content is more the result of educational philosophy and objectives than of program location or sponsorship. Just as content is controlled by objectives that control values, objectives and the values driving them are revealed by content.

The music education community has always been engaged in a vigorous struggle to obtain sufficient time for music in the elementary and secondary curriculum. In some situations, this battle has been successful to the point that regular instruction in music is a part of elementary education with the opportunity provided for advanced study on an elective basis during the junior and senior high school years. Of course, the glory of American music education is the outstanding productivity of performing organizations at all educational levels.

In more unfortunate situations, the lack of sufficient time for music instruction reduces the possibility of discipline-based content as the center of music study. The elementary music specialist who sees each student for half an hour every two weeks cannot be expected to have the same approach to content for his or her discipline as the general classroom teacher who spends no less than thirty minutes each day in sequential development of his students' mathematic skills.

Decisions about content in music curricula also involve questions regarding the appropriate balance between discipline-based curricular study and experience of the art form. The rise of an arts advocacy movement during the last twenty years and the increased economic pressures on creative and performing artists and their institutions have produced pervasive articulation of arts education theories that emphasize arts experiences over disciplinary study as the basis for arts education. At its extreme, this theory would state that music education can be most effectively accomplished by having students attend performances and rehearsals by professional artists. While no one can argue that such experiences should not be part of the education process, it is difficult to believe that such experiences alone will produce the same educational result as actual study of music, which develops individual knowledge and skill in the performance, analysis, and history of the discipline. Unfortunately, the economics of the arts and arts education have brought either/or positions on the discipline/experience debate to the forefront of policy discussion concerning K–12 education in all the arts disciplines.

The issue of content is also related to the vernacular, intellec-

tual, and psychological powers of music. Clearly, music has the power to serve as a strong bonding agent for various groups of people. In an increasingly fragmented society, this vernacular power can become a serious impediment to agreement on the content of school-based music curricula. Likewise, the psychological power of music has always been a matter of concern, although this power does not seem so widely recognized in music as in those arts that involve direct verbal and representational means. However, common knowledge that the arts can manipulate and change the thinking of individuals and that works of art are value-laden and emotionally powerful produces public uneasiness about many aspects of curricular content.

The intellectual power of music is well-understood by those with a high level of education in the discipline, but remains a mystery to most other individuals. For many reasons, our educational process in music is not sufficiently oriented to producing broad access to the intellectual aspects of the art. However, it is highly possible that significant focus on providing students with the capabilities to deal with the intellectual power of music can begin to transcend concerns growing out of oversimplified misunderstandings and fears about its vernacular and psychological powers.

It seems important to join those who have pointed out that current educational results being achieved on a daily basis are critical to the future. Each student is a potential future power in the decision-making process creating the context for music education. It is hardly satisfactory to have such individuals involved in just any kind of musical experience, whether in the schools or outside of the schools. Simple exposure to music will not necessarily produce future understanding of the importance of universal music study in K–12 institutions. To the extent that students leave their schooling with no knowledge of music's performance, historical, and analytical components or how music as an art form can produce unique understanding about the world, our educational system has produced a potential decision-maker who will not see music and music education as something of primary importance.

Partnership: Who Has Fundamental Strategic Control?

Music education is not confined solely to school-based instruction. In fact, successful music education demands a partnership among the various elements of the music and education communities. This necessarily involves specialist music teachers in

elementary and secondary schools, music teachers in and out of school settings, musicians not engaged primarily in teaching, and public constituencies, including arts advocates and patrons of music presentation organizations. Decisions about opportunity and content should dictate the balance of strategic control among these groups with respect to music education; however, the delegation of power is rarely so logical.

The music education community has significant tactical control over the delivery of music education: music teachers control moment-by-moment instruction in their own classrooms. However, it is not clear the extent to which the music education community has strategic control, or even strategic weight, with respect to opportunity and, increasingly, with respect to curricular content. These situations notwithstanding, the music education community is presently faced with the opportunities provided by increased public concern about the condition of American elementary and secondary education. Yet, while the educational requirements discussed nationally as being applicable to all students include passing references to the arts, it is difficult for arts educators to have the impact on educational policy formulation possible for their colleagues teaching language, science, computer technology, and mathematics. Of course, it is easier to make the case for these subjects since they are directly tied to the public's perception of educational content essential to the nation's material and economic well-being. Whatever the merit of this perception, the result is that our worthy competitors in cultural formation have succeeded in recapturing the strategic high ground of educational priorities. The clear relationship between the values exemplified by these priorities and the values necessary to provide operational mechanisms for producing universal music education at the K-12 level have clear ramifications for the future of school-based music education and, by extension, the future of American culture.

While strategic control over content in school-based music education formerly was the sole province of the music education community, this control is now being challenged by individuals and groups who believe strongly that responsibility for content belongs equally or primarily with individuals and organizations whose initial and basic purpose is to support the presentation of art.

In facing this situation creatively, music educators must remember that policy development tends to produce operational systems that have internal consistency, and that decisions allo-

cating strategic control gravitate toward the maintenance of such consistency. For example, if music education is to be primarily experiential, it is logical to assume that all those with professional expertise in providing musical experiences should be responsible for formulating policies about content. If, on the other hand, music education is grounded in teaching the discipline of music—performance, analysis, and history—then those who are primarily devoted to teaching these aspects of music should control content.

Therefore, to the extent that an in-school music education program focuses on simply the provision of experiences, whether because of time constraints or personal preferences of the teacher, that program invites the prospect of being lost completely or of having strategic control over content transferred to patrons and administrators affiliated with professional performers or ensembles deemed more expert than teachers in providing high quality experiences. If, on the other hand, the focus is on a discipline-based approach enriched by the highest quality of appropriate musical experience, music education personnel providing regular instruction necessarily remain in control of the curricular policy process. Thus, the discipline/experience balance in any local situation relates directly to the structure of partnership between music teachers and professional performers and groups.

The issue of partnership is also critical beyond the local level. Policies made at the state level, in regions, and at the national level have serious impact on our national capabilities in music education. However, at these levels, policy considerations generally deal as much with creating contexts for local decision-making as with developing specific policies for local application.

For example, during the last twenty years, tremendous national publicity has been secured for the concept of artists-in-schools. Its proponents have made the concept and its positive aspects known at every possible level of policy influence. The purpose of artists-in-schools advocates has not been to write specific criteria or to impose a national plan that forces each school to develop an artists-in-school program. Rather, the objective has been to create a philosophical climate at all levels of decision-making conducive to increased voluntary acceptance of and desire for the artists-in-schools concept.

This massing of the contexts affecting educational decision-making in favor of artists-in-schools programs has been extremely effective in paving the way for their establishment on a

continuous basis. It has also been extremely effective in changing public perception of the locus for expertise in arts education from groups of professional arts educators such as Music Educators National Conference to artists-in-schools advocacy groups such as arts councils, foundations, and support entities for performance organizations, almost none of whom have significant contact with the mainstream music education community, and most of whom have no academic arts education expertise.

Therefore, those who believe that music education goes beyond mere experiences have the serious problem of maintaining, and in some cases regaining, a measure of strategic control over content. There is also a problem of maintaining control over policy discussions leading to decisions about what content should be. If one is committed to the study of music as a discipline, the urgency to regain a national voice for rigorous, sequential, comprehensive instructions could be more critical.

There are the partnership issues of control versus representation and representation versus policy effectiveness. Because of the constant struggle to gain appropriate recognition for their work, music educators are always interested in being represented in policy development. Music teachers wish to be reassured that their voice has been heard in the decision-making process. However, representation does not mean that music educators have achieved appropriate professional control. Control is possible only when there is a base of commonly accepted values that can delineate the proper course for policy development by serving as a means for proposing policy directions on one's own and for evaluating policy proposals as they arrive from other sources. It is only by representing something positively and aggressively that any group achieves strategic effectiveness in the policy development process. To the extent that music teachers can be proactive at all levels on behalf of serious and rigorous music education, the music education community can avoid a reputation as being simply reactive or negative about the proposals of others.

Fortunately, the music education community has much to be *proactive* about; however, as is the case with many professionals, music educators forget to speak with the general public often enough about fundamental principles that they themselves take for granted. In the current arts policy environment where access to the arts advocacy system is problematic for arts educators, such a posture is a formula for disaster.

Without question, partnerships with colleagues in the national

music and arts enterprises are to be sought whenever possible and practicable. However, partnership for partnership's sake is not always wise or prudent. The conditions for every partnership must be evaluated with respect to what they mean for strategic control in areas vital to the delivery of serious, rigorous education in music at the local level. Whichever partnership results in reduction of this control, especially with respect to loss of curricular emphasis in favor of arts experiences, such partnership is against the immediate educational interests of students and, ultimately, destructive to the context necessary to continue serious music education.

Funding: Who Gets the Music Education Dollar?

If policy decisions about opportunity, content, and partnership are appropriate and internally consistent, policy questions about funding patterns are not hard to answer. However, since every current constituency in the music education picture has an economic interest that *will* be protected in all circumstances, insofar as possible, funding itself is a matter of high priority in policy development. However, this obvious and powerful connection often causes funding to become paramount in policy considerations. When this happens, policy follows funding rather than funding following policy. This disastrous course is one of man's favorite self-inflicted tragedies, the historical record of which never prevents the tragedy from being played out over and over again. Therefore, since it is often necessary to develop policy from a funding perspective, the music education community must be aggressive in keeping funding battles centered on issues of educational content. The principal issue must be what students learn.

Almost all concerned with music education recognize that most serious arts and arts education enterprises work under chronic financial duress. This situation has always been tense, but it has become especially so due to the current level of interest in music and arts education by what some have referred to as the "new arts establishment" and others have referred to as the "advocacy establishment." This "new arts" or "advocacy" establishment usually is identified as being centered in the work of governmentally sponsored arts councils, national foundations, and the arts education efforts of presentation institutions such as performing arts centers and museums.

Naturally, this establishment gravitates toward an experiential approach to arts education. Part of their argument is based upon

belief that such experiences can provide a better arts education than that available to most students, given present conditions in elementary and secondary schools. However, the provision of such experiences also has significant funding and public relations benefits for those involved in providing them.

Some traditional art educators, alarmed by the prospect that public understanding of the need for a discipline/experience balance is being lost in arts education, question the extent to which the new arts establishment is strategically and tactically engaged with specialist arts teachers, the arts community in higher education, and the few parents committed to discipline-based music and arts education programs as fundamental components of school curricula.

The increasing debate on this question continues to develop a public policy inquiry about the extent to which the economic agendas of the new arts establishment are having a positive or negative effect on the values influencing consideration about opportunity, content, and strategic control in music and arts education.

Perhaps the most unfortunate aspect of the arrival of the advocacy establishment on the arts education scene is its tendency to refute questions posed by the professional music education community concerning the relationship of funding to educational content by pointing out that the professional music teacher and his organizations cannot possibly be objective in debate because the outcome relates to funding that provides the music educator with a livelihood. This is a perfect example of the destructive results of allowing funding considerations to override all other principles and aspirations in policy development. For example, when funding considerations override issues of content and opportunity in music education, discussion becomes sidetracked onto "special interests." This places the music education professional in a no-win situation where he loses position, credibility, and ultimately, the entire argument simply by being a professional teacher of music.

Therefore, it is an error to argue the case for school-based music education on funding grounds alone. While dollars must be placed behind our aspirations, it is on the quality of those aspirations, the consistency of those aspirations with substantive and realistic educational objectives, and the applicability of those aspirations to the development of human capabilities that music educators must make their case for strong music education programs. Concerns about the particulars of music education

funding must always be expressed in terms of the results of such funding patterns for opportunity and content.

Politics: Who Gets Public Credit

Public credit for doing good is a basic currency of further opportunity (i.e., funding) in education and the arts, and, for better of worse, spectacle through public relations has become a basic currency of politics at all levels.

Even though Johnny's struggle with Algebra II is not newsworthy, no one denies the importance of daily school work in mathematics. Unfortunately, there seems to be no parallel in our value system about education in music or the other arts disciplines. Therefore, a major question is the extent to which promotion of experiential approaches such as visiting artists, kiddie concerts at the symphony, or in-school approaches such as performing ensembles that learn only small contest repertories—all of which focus on the provision of spectacle—tends to reinforce perceptions negative to an appropriate discipline/experience balance in curriculum-based music education.

As part of its policy analysis agenda, the music education community must face the possibility that present manifestations of the connections between politics, spectacle, music presentation, and music education are producing short-term public relations and economic benefits for the new arts establishment and certain traditional music educators at the long-term cost of losing a national approach to education in music based in serious content and disciplined study.

A review of this situation seems particularly critical as the political system becomes more and more involved in areas of education beyond funding. The provision of opportunities, and the formation of partnerships have always been in the sphere of political influence to some extent. Now, however, there is an increasing tendency for political institutions, especially at the state level, to become concerned about content at a level of curricular detail heretofore unprecedented.

No Simple Solutions

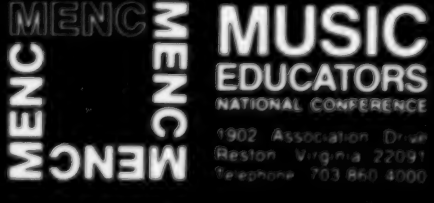
All five of these important questions defy simplistic solutions; pondering them produces as many further questions as answers. Far from being a problem, this condition of intellectual difficulty is conducive to the intensification of study and thought essential in contemporary discourse about teaching and learning music. As we have shown, there is a significant interrelationship among all

five policy questions. In fact, it is useful to think of the five having a circular rather than linear relationship. The policy context for music education is extremely complex. Indeed, it is one of those situations where the complex cannot be made simple without severe distortions. Appropriate solutions cannot be written on bumper stickers.

Whatever the applicability of this particular series of policy questions, it is essential that all concerned with music education remember that such questions are being asked by policy-makers with little knowledge of the field, either individually or collectively. Further, many of them are answering these questions from value systems less than centered in the basic functions of either music or music education, or even the arts or arts education.

Given this situation, there are only two choices: to do something or to do nothing. To do nothing is always easy; however, in the arena of sophisticated policy analysis, to do something is more than difficult, primarily because there is no assurance that any action taken will, in itself, lead to specific documentable progress in the short term. Policy influence at the highest level has no clear trajectory and no absolute result except long after the fact. It is a nebulous business and only the greatest resolve will keep an individual or group engaged long enough to make a difference. Given the history of music education in the United States, the music education community can be effective in current policy work at the highest level if it can manage a new infusion of will to do what is necessary as a field. In the policy arena, will is more important than money—will expressed not in the strident petulance characteristic of a group fragmenting from the whole in unilateral pursuit of its own narrow economic interests, but rather will exercised in pursuit of reasoned solutions essential for continuation of a civilized democracy.

Editor's note: This article is adapted from an editorial appearing in the November/December 1984 issue of *Design for Arts in Education* magazine.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